

Skybolt Aeromotive Corporation
9000 Airport Blvd
Leesburg, FL 34788

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Docket Management System
US Department Of Transportation
Room Plaza Level 401
400 Seventh St, SW
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Subject: False and Misleading Statements Regarding Aircraft Products

To Whom it May Concern:

Skybolt is a 20 year company experienced in distribution of aviation fasteners. For the past 10 years, Skybolt has concentrated on the manufacturing of ¼ Turn Cowling Fasteners common to just about every aircraft design.

Initially, Skybolt manufactured specific components for several STCs we developed to convert one fastener design to another, thus improving upon the original design considerably. Skybolt obtained the STCs and the FAA-PMA authority to produce such fasteners. Working with the FAA, we managed to uncover many gray areas, particularly in the Standard Parts category. This led to the formation of TSO-C148 to create a non-gray approval process for the type of fasteners we wished to manufacture. We eventually became a launch company for ¼ turn fasteners approved under TSO-C148. Although the definition of Standard Parts in no way infers that any company or individual is free to manufacture and market a simple fastener for aircraft use, it does seem to place the burden of responsibility on the installer.

The current problem in our industry is that the typical small aviation repair shop, mechanic, or aircraft owner has no clue as to exactly what the rules are and who is ultimately responsible for installation of even the simplest screw on a certified airplane. This ignorance has prevailed right until the present. Even the Form 337 process is not clear to too many aircraft mechanics and aircraft owners. We have experienced the reality of the 337 process in the days some of our replacement kits were not STC'd, but were such a simple replacement, the issue never became challenged.

Now the Form 337 process has become much more difficult without a supporting STC. Although common sense should always have its place in any regulatory environment, it now becomes challenged when certain companies operate outside the line of reason. This then forces the FAA to simply reject a 337 application and force the operator to obtain the STC, either on his own or through the producer of the product. This is why Skybolt supports the proposed rule making. There are companies we compete with who blatantly mislead the customer as to the origin of the part or to the responsibility of installation. Skybolt has made formal complaints to the FAA only to find that the powers of the FAA over the Standard Parts issue remain unclear. It is very clear to us, but from a true enforcement standpoint, the FAA clearly needs authority over "False or Misleading Statements". If a company can continue to find gray areas to produce parts, the FAA must use all authority to insure that the end user clearly understands where the responsibility lies. To quote the legal jumbo to each and every aircraft owner in understandable language would be impossible. To target the company who promotes false or misleading statements certainly is something the FAA needs the authority to do and can easily execute and manage. This is not to suggest an all out assault on legitimate companies in an earnest attempt to play by the rules. However, in our experience, a competitor simply claimed ignorance to the law, and the FAA appeared to accept that as a hopeful attempt to comply with the law. We at Skybolt find this unacceptable to our industry and truly hope that the proposed ruling will give the FAA full authority to clearly stop any producer from making any product for use on a certified aircraft unless that product is approved by some process such as STC, FAA-PMA, TSO, or what ever authority falls under the FAA's jurisdiction. The fastener industry underwent a severe shakeup in the 1980s and we

thought the problem was solved. We know that it has been solved 99.9%. This must be a 100% or there will always be a producer who will bend the rules enough until all of us end up paying when a giant hammer from regulation costs us all because .01% of the players just cannot understand simple rules. Regulating that I not make a false or misleading statement of obvious proportion should be a given.

Skybolt competes with a former subsidiary by the name of Milspec Products, Inc. While Skybolt has invested tens of thousands of dollars and countless man-hours on FAA approvals, our competitor may not be able to make such a claim. Unfortunately, without some action by the FAA, Milspec may continue to produce unapproved parts under some claim of ignorance of the FARs. What we worry about at Skybolt is that at some point in time an issue will arise that will confuse our industry, particularly our companies, and invoke regulations that will cost those of us that survive a bundle of money and even we may not be able to survive. This is not to claim this company's product is necessarily bad, it is to claim that they produce parts that do not meet approvals and in some point in time someone is going to really get burned. It is the retaliation that will hurt all of us, no matter how much in compliance our products are. This company actively markets their products on their website, www.milspecproducts.com to imply that they provide products for use on certified aircraft. They imply that they supply brand name products, when in reality, much of what they may provide may be manufactured by themselves with no approval process via an STC or PMA (other than one has been applied for). If the simple process of application allows a producer a free ticket to ride, then our industry has a real problem.

The proposed FAA-2003-1562 should eliminate those producers who operate outside sound principles. Those companies would be free to produce a part just as long as they clearly state that the product is at the users risk and that the Form 337 application applies prior to the installation of the product. Simply manufacturing a part and claiming it fits a Beech Bonanza, for instance, infers that it can be used on a Bonanza. Unfortunately, too many Bonanzas end up with that part out of the ignorance of the mechanic who installed it or the owner who bought it. Currently, the regulations are vague on the producer but can be severe to the end user. Skybolt believes that this proposed rule making will place the burden on the non-conforming producer where it belongs.

Sincerely,

Ned C. Bowers, President